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Middle East

. . . Its STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

The strategic importance of the

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The strategic importance of the Middle East stems from two major factors—one geographical and the other geological. Geographically, the Middle East is the corridor connecting the Eastern Hemisphere's three major continents. It is the avenue through which a Soviet strategic line of communication to the Far East may be established. The advent of supertankers and intercontinental aircraft may have lessened the area's geographical importance, but certainly has not eliminated it. In addition, the Eastern Mediterranean is vital to the defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) southern flank.

Geologically, the Middle East is synonymous with oil. Middle East oil supplied 13 percent of preboycott U.S. demand, 75 percent of Western Europe's, and 85 percent of Japan's. Within the next decade, there is not likely to be significant diminution in the dependence of the industrialized West and Japan on the Middle East source of energy. Prior to initiation of the President's energy program, projections indicated that the United States would require Middle East oil to fulfill over 30 percent of our needs in the 1980s. One-third of the non-Communist world's supply of oil is projected to come from Saudi Arabia and Iran alone.

Superimposed on these strategic considerations is the longstanding commitment, reflecting public opinion in the United States, made by both the Congress and every President since Truman to the survival of Israel. The credibility of this commitment, like all other U.S. international obligations, depends on the proven past record of performance by the United States, including the performance of our Armed Forces. Of further significance is the fact that the area is the birthplace of three of the world's great religions.

It is against this background that the varied, compound, and interdependent objectives of the United States must be viewed. Peace and stability are our principal national objectives, and defusing the Middle East crisis is central to global security. This point, where the interests of major powers converge, has all the necessary ingredients for being the cockpit for great power confrontation; and yet, there are political and military forces at work well outside the scope of the usual "Communist" and "Free World" interface. If the aggravations of this area go unresolved, it threatens to be the "Balkans" of the late 20th century. Second only to peace is the crucial need to insure access for both the United States and her allies to the energy resources of the area. Until substitute energy sources are established, we will remain dependent, in part, upon oil from the Middle East. Also present here is the potential for divisiveness which could damage severely the cohesion of the Atlantic Community and U.S.-Japanese relations. The fragmentation of Free World alliances, which could result from the issue, is a matter of grave concern. Serious diplomatic efforts to reduce this potential divisiveness continue.

A further U.S. goal remains the denial of hegemony over this strategic area by the Soviet Union or any other power. Domination of the area by such a power would endanger NATO's southern flank, reduce U.S. mobility,

Iran's refineries ship oil products throughout the world. Until substitute energy sources are established, the United States remains dependent, in part, upon oil from the Middle East.

Middle East

and endanger our lines of communication. It also would sever the economic and military relationships we have so carefully nurtured in the interest of the region's stability, progress, and independence.

Last October the diversity, turmoil, mutual fear, and mistrust rampant in the region again passed over the threshold of semicontrolled tension—neither war nor peace—into conflict for the fourth time since Israel's founding. The conflict was violent and costly. Efforts to insure an uninterrupted flow of supplies to Israel during the conflict in order to maintain a balance of forces in the area resulted in U.S. expenditures of about $1 billion, including airlift operating costs of $42 million. Congress promptly enacted an emergency security assistance act providing $2.2 billion for Israel. When the ceasefire became effective on October 24, 1973, the Israelis held the dominant terrain in the Golan Heights and a sizable new segment of Syrian territory. On the Sinai front, Israel had established a bridgehead across the Suez Canal and the Egyptians were retaining the positions they had regained on the east bank of the canal. The Soviet Union had a naval force of 96 ships, including 29 modern surface combatants and 23 submarines, in the Mediterranean—at their peak strength—a force equal to the total number of such ships operated out of home waters by the U.S.S.R. worldwide in 1969.

COMMENTARY AND REPEATED ANALYSIS

There has been much commentary and repeated analysis of this conflict, a great deal of which would give the impression that a new era of warfare has been entered and that the "lessons learned" are of such significance that new military texts are required. In my view, this impression is unjustified. Time-honored strategic and tactical concepts have been underlined, reinforced, and footnoted—not repealed or replaced. These footnotes to military history are, however, important and worthy of consideration.

First, ready, in-being, deployed forces are essential to maintaining the territorial integrity of any area whose defense is required. The October War presented striking illustrations of two considerations which traditionally have supported this concept. The intelligence organization of the Israeli Defense Force—or IDF, as it is commonly referred to—possesses a well-deserved reputation for excellence; yet, the attackers were able to achieve almost complete strategic surprise. Preparations were conducted behind the context of routine exercises, a carefully executed political deception plan, a cloak of secrecy, and good communications security, including extensive secure landline communications.

This war, like most, was decided primarily by the impact of leadership, ability, and training.

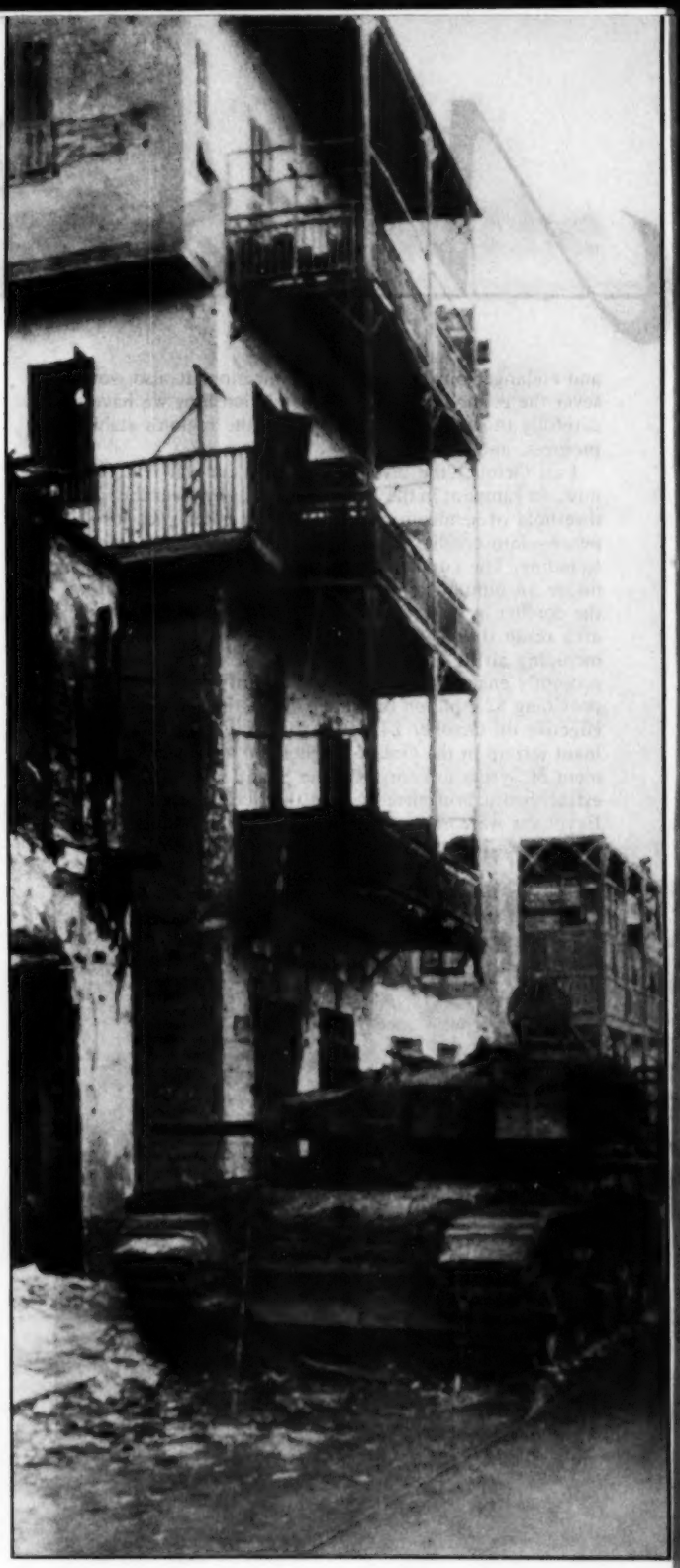
The Israelis faced a force with qualitative and quantitative advantages in equipment, quantitative advantages in personnel, and the benefit of tactical surprise. The attacking force executed a thoroughly rehearsed simple plan and gained their initial objectives. However, the Israelis ultimately achieved dominant positions on both fronts. I attribute their success to leadership, ability, and training. Adaptability and flexibility of leadership were characteristics very apparent in the IDF. The initiative displayed by officers of all ranks was often the key to success. IDF doctrine requires commanders to stay forward to "read the battle." Although the price was high, the advantages gained through decisive leadership at the critical moment made the losses worthwhile. On the other hand, the Egyptians and Syrians were well trained in manning Soviet equipment and executing Soviet tactics.

This conflict reaffirmed that in the last analysis the success or failure of an investment in national security depends upon the ability to attract to the service of the country outstanding young men and women who will rise to positions of military leadership and responsibility. There is a difference between leadership and management. Leadership is of the spirit, compounded of personality, vision, and training. Its practice is an art. Management is a science and of the mind. Managers are necessary; leaders are indispensable. We, too, must continue to create and inspire military leaders—junior and senior. Additionally, the classic doctrine that the priority of employment of air assets must be given to gaining and maintaining air superiority over the battlefield has been proven once again. Today, gaining air superiority includes defeating enemy surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) in detail. Until enemy air defenses are degraded, any application of aerial firepower will be costly, but the losses will go down as air defenses are taken out. This was made clear during the Linebacker II operation in North Vietnam and again during the Middle East war. In the interim, ground forces must be capable of fighting with reduced reliance upon close air support. This can be accomplished by continuing to equip and maintain a balanced, mutually supporting, combined arms team of infantry, artillery, and armor.

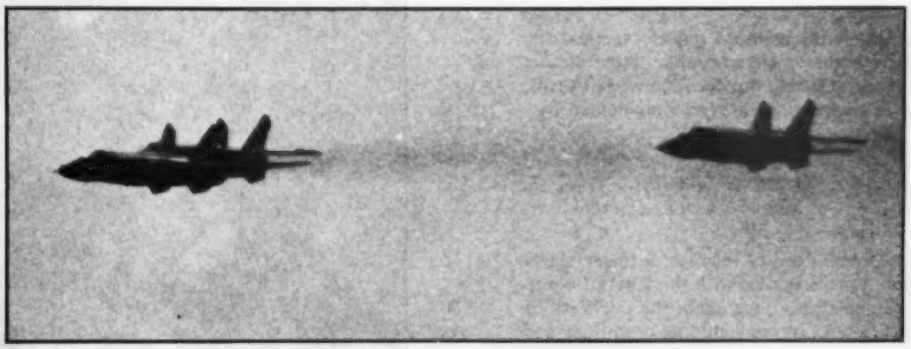
SOVIETS DEPLOY SAMS AND AAA

The Soviet Union has devoted considerable effort toward development of a SAM and antiaircraft artillery (AAA) capability, and in both Vietnam and the Middle East has demonstrated a willingness to deploy SAMs and AAA extensively outside the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries. The surface-to-air arsenal provided to the Arabs includes an across-the-board representation of the latest Soviet technology. In both Egypt and Syria, SAM systems were well forward, with many firing units located within about 50 kilometers of the line of contact. Additionally, massive numbers of both hand-held and vehicle-mounted SA-7 missiles and AAA guns were in the same area. Supporting these weapon systems was a surveillance radar system providing complete overlapping coverage at all attitudes. This defensive belt was both dense and thick. In order to achieve air superiority in the face of such defenses, it is necessary to avoid, suppress, or destroy such systems. Electronic countermeasures (ECM) and the ability to locate and destroy mobile SAMs must be modern and sophisticated. Standoff weapons can play a major role in this effort.

On the other side of the coin, we know that a land army



A destroyed Israeli tank, left, sits in front of a shelled building during the October 1973 seige of Suez City. Three Russian-built MiG-25 Foxbat jet aircraft flown by Syrian pilots fly a mission near Golan Heights. A Lebanese tank, bottom, burns after being attacked by Israeli forces near the southern Lebanon village of Kana.



ISRAEL

SYRIA

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can provide initial defense against a modern tactical air attack by extensive employment of mobile, integrated surface-to-air missile systems; but for defense in depth, these ground force weapons must be complemented by air superiority fighters.

Finally, the lessons and impact of the war with regard to direct U.S. operations should be addressed. Three facets are of particular concern: supply levels and production base, mobility, and operating bases.

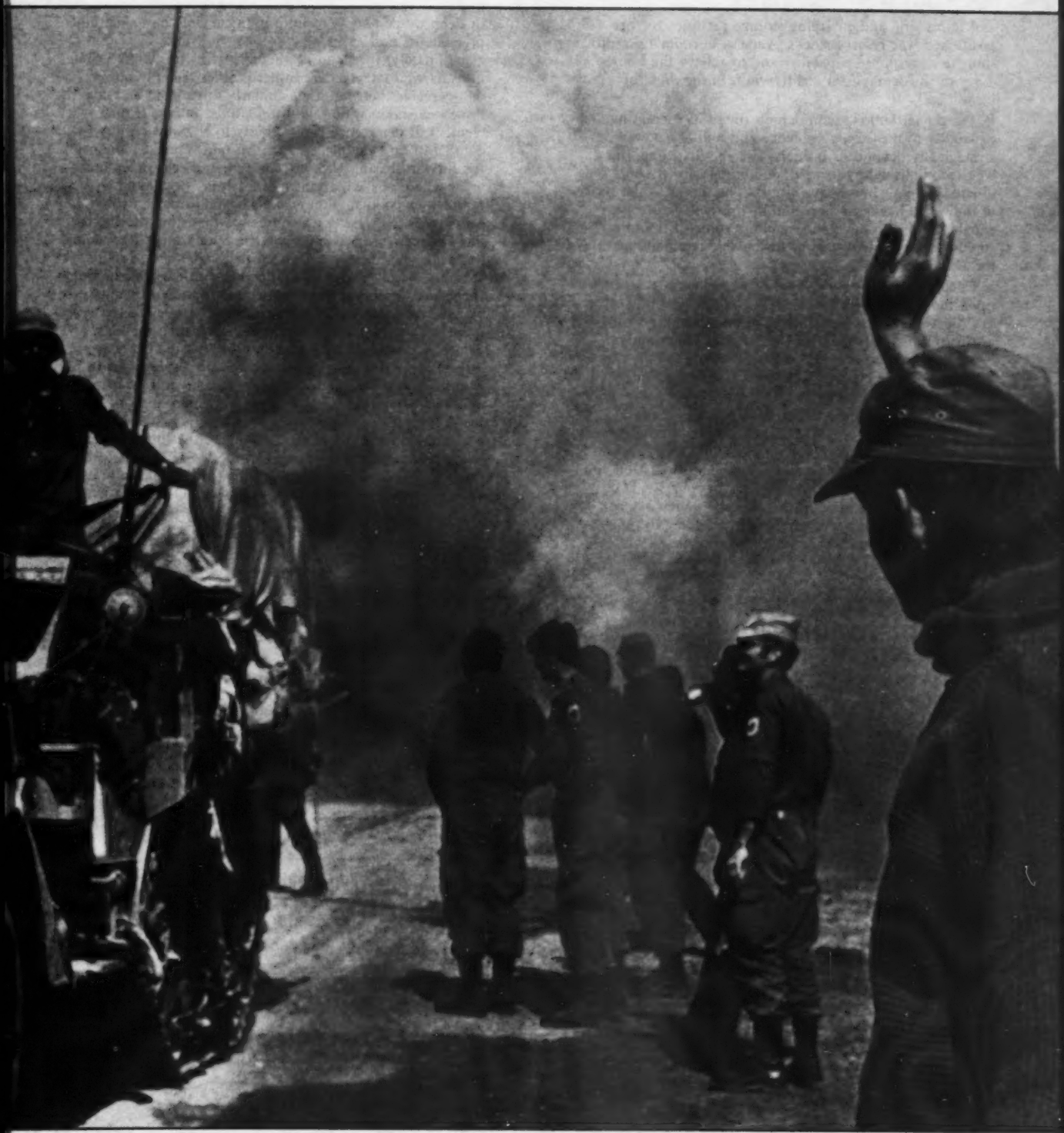
The enormous expenditure of missiles, artillery shells, and antitank munitions, together with the level of equipment attrition, demonstrates once again the necessity of maintaining ample stocks of conventional munitions and equipment.

Difficulties experienced as a result of providing moderate quantities of equipment and munitions to Israel have emphasized the magnitude of worldwide deficiencies in the level of arms, munitions, and war material maintained by the United States. These serious shortages of specific types of munitions are compounded by distribution problems and inadequate storage facilities overseas. Critical shortages of equipment and secondary items exist. New requirements from future crises in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, or elsewhere for similar support would further complicate the problem and could degrade significantly our conventional deterrent.

EFFICIENT LOGISTICS IS COMBAT BACKBONE

The conflict once again demonstrated that an efficient logistic system is the backbone of any sustained combat capability. If we are to provide our forces with that degree of material readiness sufficient to conduct a conventional defense in NATO or elsewhere and to provide our allies with the ability to defend themselves, we must quickly build up inventory levels for all items of supply and equipment in conjunction with establishing warm production bases for selected high consumption items. We anticipate establishing a Continental United States (CONUS) based stock of munitions and equipment which can be used to support allies under emergency conditions,

United Nations Emergency Forces (UNEF), right, wave to Israeli troops in halftracks as they pull back from the Suez Canal during the final stage of troop disengagement agreement with Egypt.



and improving and enlarging storage facilities for pre-positioned war reserve stocks overseas in order to improve short-term response capability and to relieve the immediacy of the demand for airlift/sealift in the event of hostilities.

The Soviet Union again demonstrated its increasing capability to project its influence and military power strategically beyond its borders. For the first time, this was accomplished by a rapid, continuous airlift coordinated with an impressive sealift. The threat to the peace of the world has been increased by this newly portrayed capability to introduce and maintain some of the most sophisticated Soviet weapons far outside the land mass of the U.S.S.R.

Effective strategic movement of war materials depends upon the complementing capabilities of airlift and sealift. We must retain the capability to respond rapidly with airlift to move personnel and essential supplies and equipment, and to provide sealift capability for the non-air-transportable equipment and heavy tonnages required for sustained operations.

U.S. resupply of Israel demonstrated the excellent capabilities of the C-5A and C-141. Over 500 total sorties insured an uninterrupted flow of essential supplies while the conflict continued. Increased numbers of outsized and oversized aircraft are essential to support our NATO commitment and to support the national policy of providing the material necessary for our partners to repel aggression, using their own manpower in their own defense.

MIDDLE EAST SEALIFT BORE TONNAGE BRUNT

Sealift and protection of sea lines of communication are also essential to both contingency and follow-on support operations. The airlift mounted in the Middle East conflict received well-deserved praise. Not so well publicized is the fact that from October 6, 1973, to date, sealift accounted for over 70 percent of the total tonnage moved. In order to reestablish and maintain an effective strategic movement capability, sealift forces must be augmented and modernized as a necessary complement to strategic airlift. This must include maintaining and modernizing sufficient naval escorts and carrier task forces to protect these sealift forces enroute. We also must continue to insure that our naval forces are capable of responding as fully and rapidly as they responded to this crisis.

Finally, the issue of operating bases must be faced. The United States was disappointed when some of our allies did not perceive their national interests as being identical to ours. Without the cooperation of Portugal, which consented to the use of Lajes, the resupply operation which made Israel's survival possible could not have been conducted without great hazard and almost prohibitive cost. The world has shrunk in political terms, but it is still just as many miles from a U.S. depot in Arkansas to the Middle East as ever. If in the future we are to be able to respond to a call for help of the nature and magnitude of the Israeli operation, we will need secure bases, where we will be relatively free of foreign political constraints. The best runway, storage facilities, geopolitical location, or deep water port is of little utility if political constraints preclude its use.

Ultimately, the issue is whether, when the United States finds its vital interests are in peril, other friendly powers will perceive their interests similarly threatened and continue their cooperation with the United States. If one element of deterrence is our ability to respond rapidly to conflict in faraway places, then we must consider the need for forward-basing U.S. air, ground, and sea forces in areas where our important interests may be altered by military or political compulsions beyond our control.

As you are aware, we are presently assisting the Egyptians in their project to reopen the Suez Canal. Reopening the Suez will, of course, shorten the Soviet access route from the Black Sea to the Indian Ocean. It will facilitate their deployments and operations in the Indian Ocean, which over the past several years have progressively increased in size and scope. At the same time they have gained access to support facilities in the Indian Ocean littoral areas. Because of the need to preserve access to Middle East oil through the Indian Ocean and to insure continued free movement of U.S. ships into and out of the region, it would not be in the interests of the United States to allow the Soviets to dominate the Indian Ocean with their naval presence. It is in the U.S. interests to have the ability to influence events in that area; and the capability to deploy our military power to that area is an essential element of such influence.

Recent events such as the Arab-Israeli war and the oil embargo have focused worldwide attention on the strategic importance of the Middle East and Indian Ocean areas. It has been and will continue to be the U.S. goal to maintain a military balance throughout this very important area. Recognizing that there can be no military solution to the problems in the Middle East, the maintenance of a recognized military balance is one of the best means to ward off the future outbreak of hostilities, while striving through the negotiating avenue to arrive at mutually agreeable solutions to the very complex problems which divide the governments and peoples in this region. I would not for one minute discount the depth and deep roots of these problems in the Middle East, but I believe that some progress is being made and I can assure you that we are working resolutely through diplomatic channels to see that progress continues.

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